

SELF-IDENTITY IN PREETI SHENOY'S TEA FOR TWO AND A PIECE OF CAKE

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Abstract: The image of women in fiction has undergone a drastic change during the last four decades. Women writers have transformed the characters of women from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women to independent and self determining women. In many novels, Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity for the characters. This paper throws light on the protagonist Nisha's painful life and her struggles to attain self- identity in her family and also in the society.

Keywords: Agony, Frustration, Self- Identity, Struggle.

Introduction: Indian women novelists made their debut in 1990s, producing novels which revealed the true state of Indian society and its treatment of women. The image of women in fiction has undergone a drastic change during the last four decades. In the 20th century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English literature. Today is the generation of those women writers who are mostly western educated. Preethi Shenoy is one of the famous contemporary Indian women writers in English.

Preeti shenoy is a young woman writer of India at present and author of many best sellers. Encouraged by the favourable reception of her first publications, she decided to go for a larger project and began writing her first book, *34 Bubblegums and Candies*. It is a collection of narratives based on real life incidents. Her noted works are *Tea for Two and a piece of Cake*, *Life is what you make it*, *The Secret Wish list* and *The One you cannot Have*".

Tea for Two and a Piece of Cake is a story about how a woman overcomes all odds and establishes herself. The protagonist Nisha, a "Plain-Jane" is a 26 years old girl, plump, plain-looking. Nisha's life is far from perfect and she belongs to a middle-class family in Mumbai. This paper is about the agony of the protagonist Nisha and how she struggles to get an identity in her life as a daughter, wife and also a successful business woman in the society.

Father-daughter relationship is one of the most beautiful relationships in this world. A father can play a super hero role to protect his daughter from all evils. He guides her through every moment of her life. Fathers and daughters share a unique bond between them. A father should encourage his daughter to follow her dreams. Fathers must make the effort to inspire their daughters whenever possible. One of the most important things a father can do is simply show that he is willing to be around. He should make the effort to attend special events at his daughter's school, engage her in conversation and take an interest in all part of her life. This will build her self-esteem and gives her confidence that she is a worthwhile an individual. Daughters who do not receive affection and approval from their fathers may lead to an unhealthy dependency on men.

In this novel *Tea for Two and a Piece of Cake*, Nisha grows up without her mother's love and her father's love. They both don't share a good father and daughter relationship between them. Nisha longs for her father's love and care. But he does not care wherever she goes. He mostly leaves her alone and she grows as a lonely child. Nisha is an obedient daughter and she feels content with that. "But I am satisfied, as I have done my bit as a dutiful daughter and informed him of my whereabouts" (TTPC 19).

Nisha longs for some kind of appreciations when her performances are good in school. She expects her parents around for all the school events. But her father fails to attend. She wants to share him a lot but she holds back everything. Most of the people learn bicycle ride in childhood but Nisha has no such experiences. She watches the children in her apartment go riding on their bicycles. She wants to ride a bicycle like all other children. She even requests her father to get her one. But he replied that, "A bicycle? What for? (TTPC 71) Her father does not care for her.

She watches other children longingly and they tease her like, "Ugly fatso can't ride a bike" or "Big pig can't ride a bike". (TTPC 71). She wants to share her pain to her father, how it feels to be teased all her life for being plump. It hurts her for being all alone. She says, "I remember the years of loneliness, the years of pain" (TTPC 71).

Nisha is being frustrated by her father's response for her marriage proposal. She expects her father's happiness but there is no response from him as she mentions "There is absolutely no reaction from my father. He is like stone, sitting there totally impassive and continuing to sip his buttermilk" (TTPC 81). Fathers should prevent their daughters and make them to feel special and loved. It is a duty of a father should maintain appropriate levels of discipline and create boundaries to protect her. Nisha's father does not show her love, care, protection and guidance, even though she was a dutiful daughter to him. Nisha never attain identity as a daughter in her entire life. This leads her to choose a wrong person as her life partner and again she suffers in her life.

Marriage is another way to attain God-realization but many people are not aware of it. To attain this, both the husband and wife need good understanding about leading a married life. To maintain a good relationship, a couple should possess these three qualities like patience, love and forgiveness. Married life with proper love and understanding helps to awake the feminine within a man and the masculine within a woman. This balance helps both of them to reach the final goal of eternal freedom.

Marriage marks a turning point in Nisha's life. It is quite natural that women always tend to secure their family better than man. This applies more to Indian women and our culture. Mostly pre-marital love doesn't remain the same between a couple after getting married and give birth to children. Though not spoken out, but most of the couples in India lead their marriage life out of compulsion rather than liking, unlike western countries. This is one of the reasons why Indian society is regarded as one of the best family system. In this novel, "Tea for Two and a piece of Cake", Nisha struggles a lot to attain identity as a perfect wife to Samir Sharma.

Nisha gets married to a rich and handsome man, Samir Sharma. He marries her only for sex and he says, "I am marrying you only for the sex". (TTPC 79) Marriage with its domesticity, kids and running a home has a way of putting a brake on most romances. Nisha's life is not an exception in this. They are blessed with two children, a daughter first and then a son. Nisha becomes a devoted mother rather than a good wife to Sami Sharma. She fails to satisfy his sexual hunger and slowly changes from a wife to mother.

Nisha is unaware of the slow way in which her relationship with Samir Sharma changes when she becomes a mother of two. She finds an email from Samir saying it isn't working out. That pain was too much to bear for her. It feels like a million pieces of shrapnel have entered her heart. She says, "It becomes increasingly unbearable" (TTPC 85) because in phone Samir says, "Look Nisha, the writing has been on the wall for a few years now. Don't pretend you did not notice it. I am sorry it has to come to this, but it is over" (TTPC 86).

Out of all the things he stated, two things seemed to have pierced her soul. He mentioned as "MY house" and "YOUR precious babies". He offers to give her some money to take care of children's education. Over a night, she has to make changes in her life. Nisha's husband leaves her for another woman and he would like to marry her. Nisha says, "I feel sick and nauseous at the very thought. She means more to him now than me. I have been discarded, thrown out. I have lived my 'use-by-date' (TTPC 89). Nisha does not attain identity as wife in her entire life.

Nisha, in this novel is portrayed as a deserted woman. The term "Deserted woman" means a woman whose husband does not want to continue as her life partner. A woman who is being deserted from her husband only can understand the pain behind this social evil. In such a situation, if a woman wants to live separately, she requires social, financial as well as emotional support for empowerment.

If a woman is deserted, her situation will be very critical when compared to divorcees and widows. They retain the status of a married woman and do not have the option of remarriage. Such women cannot enjoy the bliss of a married life. There is a lack of concern towards these women and their children. Nowadays, Separations, desertions and divorce are increasing in India. There is no much attention has been paid to the lives of these deserted women with their children.

A deserted woman cannot remarry till she gets divorce from her husband. To start a new marital relationship, the existing relationship needs to be brought to an end. This is possible for only strong men to accept somebody else's children and take care of them as their own.

Akash, an old friend of Nisha enters into her life. Soon her life starts a new turn under the firm and kind guidance of Akash. Though he is younger to Nisha, he is matured enough to take care of her and her children. Akash loves Nisha's children as like his biological kids. Nothing makes a woman loves a man more, than when she sees he loves her children. Nisha accepts Akash's love and lead a live- in relationship with him. As author mentioned in Epilogue "who says a marriage is needed for a lasting relationship?"

The unconventional saying "Try and try until you succeed" fits well within the walls of a successful business woman. An entrepreneur never gets an easy route to reach goals. It is often the tough road that makes her a real good business leader. One of the most enduring stereotypes about women in business is that they are weak and emotional. In order to gain respect as a business woman in society, it is important to be assertive. A woman should find her passion in life and follow it. In order to reach the top, a woman should to be passionate about what she does.

There are many successful women out there in business and also in other fields. Learning about their background, career paths motivate and inspire other women also. Reading their stories gives an idea of how the path to success looks like and what obstacles one should encounter along the way.

Nisha starts her own catering business and with all these she starts to discover a new life, a new Nisha. She starts a restaurant called 'The Soul Garden' in Pondicherry. Nisha finally attains identity as an independent and a successful business woman in society with the support of Akash.

In her life, Nisha does not attain identity as a good daughter to her father and also a good wife to her husband. Even though she is true, she never receives true love and care from them. At last she discovers identity as a business woman and leads her life with the guidance of a man who is not her husband. However a woman needs support from a man in her life for love, care and security. Almost in every street and families there are many women like Nisha struggling in their life to attain Self- identity.

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